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U.S. Inquiry Is Reported to Trace \$20 Million in Contra Donations

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 24 — The Administration has traced at least \$20 million in contributions intended for the the Nicaraguan rebels, \$10 million from the Sultan of Brunei and roughly \$10 million from private donors, according to an Administration official.

The statement marked the first time that an Administration source had put a dollar figure on the amount of money thought to have been raised for the rebels, known as contras, from private and non-American government donors.

The \$20 million would come atop money apparently diverted from profits from arms sales to Iran, a figure that has been variously estimated at \$10 million to \$30 million.

The estimate of \$10 million from Brunei is significantly more than initially suspected by Congressional investigators.

One Congressional official familiar with this estimate said today it was "much more than we had previously heard about."

Government officials said money donated by the Sultan of Brunei was paid into a Swiss bank account set up by Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the former White House staff member, or an associate and was then combined with other money raised for the contras, Government officials said.

Diversion From Arms Sales

In another development, Congressional investigators offered new details about a memorandum found in Colonel's North's files. The document, found by Justice Department investigators, refers to a plan to divert Iranian arms sales profits to the Nicaraguan rebels. The investigators said they believed that the document had been prepared last spring, at a time when the Administration was failing in efforts to win Congressional approval of military aid to the contras.

It is not clear how much, if any, of the money from Brunei, an oil-rich nation on the northwest side of the island of Borneo, was actually spent on equipment and arms for the contras. The rebels have said they received far less

than the \$20 million estimated to have been raised during the two years United States Government support was barred by Congress.

And there is still no clear figure from either the Administration or Congressional investigators of how much money was diverted to the contras from profits from the Iran arms sales.

Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d had originally put the amount at \$10 to \$30 million, but later told Congress in a closed session that this was an extrapolation from fragmentary figures.

Congressional investigators have said the size of the profits in the Iran arms deal is closer to \$10 million, with large commissions apparently having been taken by middlemen.

One senior official said today that the Administration had estimated that roughly \$10 million in equipment and arms reached the rebel forces in the last two years. Who paid for this material, he said, remained unclear.

The Administration was permitted by law to solicit humanitarian aid for the rebels, and the contribution from the Sultan has been described as falling into this category.

It is unclear whether the Administration made any attempts to assure that the money was actually spent for humanitarian purposes, and not arms. One Congressional official said that he believed the money had been put in the same bank account that was used for the funds diverted from the Iranian sale. That account, investigators suspect, was used to purchase a variety of supplies for the contras, including weapons.

Because the funds were mingled, it will be difficult, and perhaps impossible, to resolve conclusively whether any of the Brunei money was spent on arms.

Memo in North's Files

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, meanwhile, has been questioning Administration officials about a memo found in the files of Colonel North that refers to a possible plan to raise \$12 million for the contras through the Iran arms sales.

The memorandum, which is not signed or dated, was found in Colonel North's files by Justice Department in-

vestigators on Nov. 23. After being questioned about it by Attorney General Meese, Colonel North acknowledged diverting millions to the contras, Mr. Meese has told Congress.

Congressional investigators believe the document was written between April and May of this year, shortly after efforts to push new aid for the contras through the Congress collapsed. Congress eventually approved \$100 million in military and humanitarian assistance for the contras, but the money did not start flowing until the new fiscal year, which began Nov. 1.

One Congressional official speculated that the diversion may have begun after the May shipment of arms to Iran. He said the Iranians complained that the price of the weapons had been raised significantly between the first American shipment, in late February, and the second, which occurred in late May.

Suggestion by Abrams

Administration officials said the money from the Sultan of Brunei was solicited by the State Department at the suggestion of Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the sultan is the richest man in the world and he is said by Administration officials to be a committed anti-Communist.

Mr. Abrams declined to discuss the matter today. Administration officials have said that he asked Colonel North for the number of a Swiss bank account to which the money could be sent. That number was subsequently passed to Brunei.

Several days after news of the shipment first broke, a Government official in Brunei was quoted by Reuters as confirming that several million dollars had been sent to the rebels through the National Bank of Brunei.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz said on Dec. 9 in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the August 1985 law providing \$27 million in humanitarian assistance for the Nicaraguan rebels specifically allowed the State Department to solicit contributions from third countries. "There's nothing illegal about it. Quite the contrary, it was the policy of the United States," he said.

Mr. Shultz told the committee he did not discuss the contribution during a visit he made to Brunei earlier this year.